United Nations A/C.3/69/SR.8

General Assembly
Sixty-ninth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
7 January 2015

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 13 October 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Mesquita Borges ..... (Timor-Leste)

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14-62467 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Address by the President of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly

1. **Mr. Kutesa** (Uganda) President of the sixty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, commended the United Nations subsidiary bodies, agencies, funds and programmes for their contribution to the work of the Third Committee. The Committee covered critical areas related to human rights, the advancement of women and the protection of children, other vulnerable groups and the victims of humanitarian crises, exclusion and discrimination. The agenda of the Committee contained many items that were at the heart of the post-2015 agenda and reflected a commitment to a more effective and inclusive approach to development.

2. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals would require significant efforts in order to lift 1.2 billion people out of poverty; provide universal primary education; end gender-based violence and discrimination; improve the health of women and children; and combat communicable and non-communicable diseases. To ensure progress in the future, gaps in the Millennium Development Goal framework would need to be addressed. The formulation of the post-2015 agenda would need to be transformative, promote democratic governance and human rights for all, and take into account national differences. The path to a sustainable future would be long and arduous and require a strengthened global partnership, with knowledge and resources contributed from all stakeholders, including civil society.

3. He counted on the support of delegations in preparing for the International Decade for People of African Descent, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. During the resumed session in March 2015, he would convene a high-level thematic debate on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women; he had identified the topic as a key priority for the sixty-ninth session and the debate would provide an opportunity to galvanize further actions towards ensuring that women and girls achieved their full potential, including through education, economic empowerment, increased political participation and decision making. In addition, he would convene debates on means of implementation for a transformative post-2015 development agenda, and on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organizations, as well as a high-level event on climate change. He looked forward to the active engagement of Member States and counted on their support in order to ensure that discussions took place in spirit of compromise.

Agenda item 27: Advancement of women:

(a) Advancement of women (A/69/38 (Supp); A/69/222; A/69/224; A/69/211; A/69/256; A/69/368; A/69/369; and A/69/396)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference of Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/69/182 and A/69/346)

4. **Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), introducing the agenda item, said that, as 2015 approached, pressure was intensifying for world leaders to deliver on decades of promises for women and girls; the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women had recognized that not a single country had fully achieved gender equality.

5. As Member States moved into the final stage of crafting the post-2015 agenda, one of the key lessons of the Millennium Development Goals had been that gender equality, women's empowerment, and the human rights of women and girls were essential prerequisites to progress. UN-Women applauded the Open Working Group's proposed goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN-Women stood ready to work closely with Member States and civil society to consolidate gains made for women and girls.

6. It had been 15 years since the passage of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and UN-Women would support the high-level review of progress in its implementation. It would provide an opportunity to integrate women, peace and security into the global development agenda, since empowered women and empowered communities were the best engines of growth and development and the best defence against cycles of despair, radicalization, and violence.

7. Empowered women were also critical to the response to climate change: they must be able to fully and equally participate in leadership and decision-making efforts at all levels. The specific impact of climate change on women and girls must also be addressed.

8. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was a visionary road map for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women but progress in its implementation had been slow and uneven. UN-Women had been created in part to address the failure of leadership and to close the gap between commitments and action. Beijing+20 was an ideal platform for all States and other stakeholders to keep their promises. In June 2014, UN-Women had launched a global mobilization campaign that would culminate at the Global Leaders' Commitment Forum in September 2015. She called on all States to participate in that forum, and in the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, at the highest level.

9. She thanked the 154 States that had completed their national reports on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Closing the gaps identified in the reports would require action in a number of fields: strong leadership and commitment from Governments; a focus on the most marginalized women and girls; strengthening and supporting national gender equality mechanisms; greater contributions of men as gender equality advocates; and increasing investments in gender equality and women's rights.

10. Gender equality was a societal and common responsibility that must be taken up by all intergovernmental bodies. The findings of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/69/182) must be shared with other committees. UN-Women would assist delegations in consolidating attention to gender equality across the General Assembly's activities and in strengthening the gender perspective in resolutions and other outcomes. She urged Member States to seize the opportunity to build partnerships at national, regional and global levels in order to ignite a movement for gender equality.

11. Violence against women was perhaps the most widespread and tolerated of human rights violations. Recent global research showed that overall, 35 per cent of women worldwide had experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. The Secretary-General's reports on efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (A/69/222); on trafficking in women and girls (A/69/224); and global efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation (A/69/211), highlighted progress made in laws and policies, prevention and support for survivors. States had integrated their responses to female genital mutilation with broader health and social service and they had encouraged religious leaders and faith-based organizations to engage in efforts to end the harmful practice. The reports called for a comprehensive approach in addressing all forms of violence against women and girls, and for intensified prevention efforts to tackle the root causes.

12. As the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action approached, it was notable that the United Nations itself had not come close to gender parity, particularly at the senior decision-making level. In her opinion, temporary special measures for staff selection should be implemented to accelerate progress. Building a supportive, gender-sensitive work environment, work-life balance and anti-discrimination policies were essential to successful management of both female and male staff. But the most important element in achieving gender parity, however, was support from the highest levels, especially Member States.

13. **Ms. Gilmore** (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) noted the success of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Cairo Plan of Action in sharpening the focus on forms of human suffering that might otherwise elude attention and the focus on maternal deaths and disabilities, including obstetric fistula, as a result of the Millennium Development Goals. The report entitled "Supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula" (A/69/256) had been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 67/147. Obstetric fistula, a rupture in the birth canal, was the result of prolonged, obstructed labour in the absence of timely access to quality emergency obstetric care. It was a severe maternal disability and a stark manifestation of health inequality. In most cases, the baby was either stillborn or died within the days following birth. The woman was left with a devastating injury, rendering her incontinent, enforcing upon her shame and bringing alienation. Many women and girls who suffered from fistula were abandoned by their husbands and families and suffered a spiral of

impoverishment and exclusion. As stated in the report, it was a human rights violation that the world's poorest women and girls were left to suffer the devastating consequences of an essentially preventable condition that had been virtually eliminated in many countries. It was imperative that the international community should act urgently to end maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, including obstetric fistula.

14. The persistence of obstetric fistula reflected not only health inequities, but broader economic and sociocultural challenges faced by women and girls, including lack of access to schooling; child and forced marriage; the absence of preventive care; and lack of access to essential services. While obstetric fistula was almost entirely preventable and treatable, it was estimated that more than two million girls were living with the condition and only a fraction had access to treatment.

15. It was essential to increase access to fistula surgeons and holistic fistula services in strategically selected hospitals. Progress had been made in integrating obstetric fistula into national health plans and in the use of innovative approaches to raise awareness, shifting bigotry and increasing access to treatment. However, global and national plans needed investment in order to develop community- and facility-based systems that recognized obstetric fistula as a notifiable condition that triggered immediate reporting and follow-up, thereby promoting a higher level of accountability and providing a tool that would help to assess accurately the magnitude of the condition and the impact of interventions to treat and prevent it. Moreover, a national register could be used for targeted improvements in quality of care and address underlying issues in order to prevent future occurrence.

16. The report noted that, in 2003, UNFPA and partners had launched the first global Campaign to End Fistula; it had achieved some success in integrating known steps to ending obstetric fistula into a broader maternal health focus. Yet despite the progress, and exciting technological advances in support of effective repairs, the process was hampered by inadequate allocation of resources. The report recommended strengthening of national, comprehensive multidisciplinary policies, strategies and budgets that incorporated prevention, treatment, socioeconomic reintegration and essential follow-up services.

17. The factors that imposed obstetric fistula on women and girls were those that drove maternal mortality and morbidity: poverty; gender inequality; the failure to uphold women's and girls' human rights; limitations placed on access to health services; and failure to provide them with continuum of care across the life-cycle. Just like preventable maternal death, obstetric fistula could be eliminated where there was universal and equitable access to high quality reproductive health care. Substantial additional investments were needed in order to sustain and accelerate progress. By placing women's and girls' rights and health at the centre of the new global development agenda, every pregnancy and childbirth could be made safer and the scourge of obstetric fistula could be eliminated.

18. **Ms. Loew** (Switzerland) said that she was pleased that the notion of gender was reflected in recent reports. Nevertheless, while references to gender were present in some reports and in the preambular parts of resolutions, they were not always included in policy recommendations. She sought the opinion of UN-Women on the possibilities of improving that record. She welcomed the progress achieved in 2013 and 2014 by the Commission on the Status of Women and in the drafting of the post-2015 sustainable development programme. She congratulated UN-Women on the important role it had played in ensuring the quality of outcomes concerning gender parity and improving the independence and the rights of women and girls. In view of the number of ongoing intergovernmental processes, she asked what its priorities would be and how it would streamline those processes.

19. **Ms. Vadiati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that further support from the regular budget of the United Nations would help to ensure the independence and impartiality of UN-Women. Noting that the date of Beijing+20 was approaching, she asked how UN-Women would respond to the spread of violent extremism in her region and how it would tackle its root causes.

20. **Ms. Ruín** (Costa Rica) highlighted the problem of adolescent pregnancy in her region: studies had shown that it had a negative impact on the empowerment of women and on their social and economic status; it was a barrier to the completion of secondary education and to access to employment. Adolescent pregnancy occurred in the poorer sectors of

society and its legacy was a cause of intergenerational poverty. For those reasons, she was keen to see the issue of adolescent pregnancy included in the post-2015 development agenda.

21. **Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), responding to issues raised, said that she supported the suggestion by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to increase the proportion of the regular budget allocated to UN-Women; she encouraged the delegation to raise the matter in the Fifth Committee. UN-Women sought to raise awareness concerning the issue of violence against women, in particular in the face of religious extremism, at every opportunity and that it had called on men and boys and leaders in the religious community to combat violence against women. Every aspect of violence against women was covered in the post-2015 development agenda. UN-Women shared the concerns expressed on the lasting negative impacts of adolescent pregnancy and it called for comprehensive sexuality education at school, at home and in the community so that girls were able to make informed decisions. It supported the call to strengthen the normative agenda and it was for that reason that gender mainstreaming had become increasingly important in its work.

22. **Ms. Gilmore** (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that, in addition to the high cost of adolescent pregnancy which had a negative impact on women throughout their lives, a study by the World Bank had made clear that there was also a material economic cost to the detriment of the community and the country's development agenda through the loss of positive contribution as a result of the destruction of talent and creativity. Comprehensive sexuality education, with a specific focus on gender equality and access to services, including commodities for young women, were essential. It was not acceptable that 90 per cent of adolescent pregnancies occurred within marriage while young women still did not have autonomous access to a doctor: a young woman who was old enough to become a parent could not be too young to have access to contraceptives. UNFPA had advocated strongly with other United Nations partners for a focus on pregnancy within the context of early and forced marriage and for teenagers' access to sexuality and reproductive health to be integrated within the post-2015 development agenda.

23. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) said that the root causes of many of the problems outlined in the reports under consideration were to be found in poverty and precarious employment. Without education and training, women were more likely to suffer forced marriage and violence. Therefore, the introduction of legislation to protect women's rights should be accompanied by a progressive approach that included combating poverty and empowering women.

24. **Ms. Hassan** (Djibouti) supported the call to increase the allocation to UN-Women from the regular budget. She expressed some disappointment that document A/69/211, which had been drafted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/146, fell short of the in-depth, multi-disciplinary report on the root causes of and contributing factors to female genital mutilation, its prevalence worldwide and impact on women and girls. She asked how the 2014 cross-cutting report by UNICEF and UNFPA could have been better used in drafting the document.

25. **Ms. Vilaseca** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) noted with concern the growth in violence against women in South America, including through trafficking. She asked what specific measures were being considered by United Nations bodies to achieve gender equality under the sustainable development goals.

26. **Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)), responding to questions raised, said that she fully agreed with the need to combat poverty and to invest in education and development. However, it was also important to fight impunity and to uphold the rule of law in order to protect women and girls. Female genital mutilation was a complex problem and both legislation and community action were required to curb the practice; it would therefore require action across the One UN. UN-Women placed gender equality at the top of the sustainable development agenda and believed that it would be critical to include targets concerning women in the sustainable development goals; the use of disaggregated data and the evidence from the Millennium Development Goals would help effective costing and tracking of implementation and monitoring of targets. UN Women was currently

drafting a comprehensive overview of action taken in individual countries, a process that was allowing it to identify the direction of future action.

27. **Ms. Gilmore** (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), responding to the representative of Djibouti, said that the joint UNFPA/UNICEF report on the programme on female genital mutilation had been discussed extensively at a joint session of their Executive Boards and the recommendations made had been taken up in country programmes and used as a basis for forward-looking design. The outcomes of the evaluation had been positive, and the support of Member States for the work of the joint programme was deeply appreciated. She agreed that, in such fields, knowledge was as valuable as income in broadening success.

28. Poverty was both a cause and a consequence of the failure to uphold the human rights of women and girls. The onset of puberty appeared to be a tipping point: if girls did not have the social assets to protect themselves by the age of 10, they could suffer female genital mutilation; early and forced marriage; sexual violence; unwanted pregnancy; obstetric fistula; and removal from access to public assets, including school. Epidemiological and demographic data indicated that the gravest human cost was being paid by girls between the ages of 10 and 15 years, who had the least recourse to justice and reparation. The problem had become urgent in an era that had the largest cohort of adolescents in human history.

29. **Ms. Ameline** (Chair, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), speaking at the invitation of the Chair in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/138, said that the time had come to reinforce the Committee's visibility and to underscore the progress it had made. She paid tribute to Ms. Navi Pillay, former High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her relentless advocacy for women's rights and gender equality and expressed confidence that the new High Commissioner, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, would honour the expectations vested in him by millions of women.

30. Highlighting that women's rights were fragile in the current context of international conflicts and crises, she thanked all those who worked to protect and promote them. The Committee had been reassured to find, in considering periodic reports of States parties, that implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was of common concern to States parties, United Nations entities, women's rights activists and human rights defenders.

31. The adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 68/268 on 14 April 2014 had been a milestone in strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of the treaty body system. She thanked Member States for their meaningful engagement throughout the intergovernmental process on treaty body strengthening. Her Committee had revised its rules of procedure in order to incorporate the outcomes of the process and it had decided to rationalize its working methods by limiting the number of questions in the lists of issues and by drafting shorter and more focused concluding observations. A simplified reporting procedure would be offered to States parties provided that they had submitted an updated core document. In an effort to harmonize its jurisprudence with that of other treaty bodies, the Committee had worked with the Committee on the Rights of the Child in order to draft a joint general recommendation on harmful practices; it had also met with the Human Rights Committee to discuss issues of common concern.

32. With 188 States parties, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women was the only near-universal human rights instrument for the comprehensive protection of women's rights. It was also an instrument for women's empowerment and equal participation. The Committee had supported her call, at the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals in February 2014, for the targets in the post-2015 development agenda to be more ambitious than those of the Millennium Development Goals. The post-2015 agenda must acknowledge that the substantive aspects of gender equality and non-discrimination spelled out under the Convention were essential components of sustainable development. Women were the main drivers of development but they continued to be under-represented in political and public life and were excluded from decision-making processes in all areas; more must be done to fill the gaps.

33. One of the main purposes of the United Nations was to maintain international peace and security and the international human rights treaties played a role in shaping and implementing a culture of peace. Her Committee called on the international community to

reaffirm the place of women's rights in a peaceful and equitable international order and supported recent initiatives to propose the nomination of the Committee for the Nobel Peace Prize.

34. Women were the first victims and targets in armed conflicts and they were frequently targets of terrorism. General recommendation No.30, adopted by the Committee, on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, stressed the importance of women's involvement in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building and highlighted the need for a concerted and integrated approach that placed the Security Council agenda on women, peace and security into the broader framework of implementation of the Convention. She encouraged Member States to integrate general recommendation No.30 into their national action plans for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

35. Since October 2013, the Committee had examined the disastrous impact of armed conflict on women's and girls' lives in states experiencing conflict, including Iraq, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic and Syria. In July 2014, the Committee had adopted a statement on the situation of women in Gaza, calling on parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under the Convention to protect the rights of women. It had also emphasized the urgent need to revive the peace process with women's participation.

36. The Committee supported fully the Beijing+20 review process and thanked UN-Women, the other members of the Inter-Agency Group on CEDAW Reporting and civil society for their contribution to its consideration of periodic reports.

37. Turning to the role of national parliaments in the implementation of the Convention, she welcomed their increased involvement in the elaboration of States parties' periodic reports and their active role in designing legislative measures to follow-up on the Committee's concluding observations. The Committee's increased cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union added a new perspective to its work and broadened the possibilities for disseminating the Convention among national decision-makers. Member States would play a key role in ensuring that all women enjoyed freedom from want and fear without discrimination.

38. **Ms. Loew** (Switzerland) said that implementation of the Committee's recommendations would be of benefit to all Member States. Sustainable development could only be achieved through gender equality and Switzerland was committed to the economic empowerment of women. In many countries, budgets for reproductive health remained low and women did not have access to free and safe contraceptive methods, they did not have control over their own bodies, including their choice of clothing, and they were excluded from public spaces. She asked how countries would overcome the barriers that limited the empowerment of women.

39. **Ms. Kaljulate** (European Union) speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland and Serbia; the stabilization and association process country, Albania,, potential candidate country, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; and, in addition, Georgia and Ukraine, said that she particularly appreciated the fact that the Committee had held meetings with members of civil society and human rights institutions. She reiterated her support for the work of the Committee and commended its focus on treaty body strengthening. She noted that the Committee had considered reports from eight States under article 18 of the Convention and that it had issued a statement on the role of women in the process of political transition in which concerns were expressed at attempts to discredit the Convention and recalling the legal obligations of States parties to implement all provisions of the Convention. The European Union appreciated the fact that the Committee urged State parties to refrain from invoking customs, traditions and cultural or religious considerations in order to justify non-compliance with their legal obligations under the Convention.

40. The European Union undertook to strengthen cooperation with UN-Women, including in the process of developing the post-2015 development agenda to promote gender equality. She sought further information with regard to the role of women in the processes of political and societal transition and an assessment of their prospects for improvement. She sought more specific comments on how non-discrimination had been considered and mainstreamed in the post-2015 development agenda.

41. **Mr. Hisajima** (Japan) said that his delegation shared the view that normative standards that were

intrinsically linked to development were necessary, in particular in the field of sexual and reproductive health and child, early and forced marriage. He sought the view of the Chair of the Committee on what kind of standards or measurements would be appropriate, and how national parliaments could be involved in implementing the standards.

42. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer, State of Palestine) expressed appreciation for the statement adopted by the Committee on the situation of women in Gaza, which called on parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under the Convention to protect the rights of women. However, more urgent action was needed to protect women in Gaza; a lack of accountability for the perpetrators of crimes and rights violations encouraged their repetition. She asked whether the Committee envisaged the development of a mechanism that would enforce accountability for the perpetrators of crimes against women.

43. **Ms. Mansouri** (Algeria) underlined her Government's support for the Committee and asked how it would work to ensure universal ratification of the Convention. Algeria had established a successful quota system to ensure the representation of women in its parliament; she wished to know whether the Committee would become involved in work to increase the presence of women in national parliaments and in decision-making processes.

44. **Ms. Ameline** (Chair, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) agreed that the provision of adequate health services was of primary importance for women and it was an issue that was raised by the Committee with all States parties. States were also encouraged to be vigilant in cases of rape and to permit abortion where possible under national laws. In the context of different customs and religions, it should be emphasized that the Convention was incompatible with any form of violence or discrimination against women. On the question of the protection of women in armed conflict, she explained that the Committee had developed a road map for the Convention to be used to prevent conflict through the promotion of good governance and peace. Greater efforts were needed to ensure that more women were included in peace processes and in the rebuilding phase, including in elections. The Convention was intended to protect women's rights; however, it could also be an instrument within peace processes and to bolster the link between development policy and the rights of women. The consolidation of a legislative approach should be part of the post-2015 development agenda. Statistical tools and quantifiable achievements should be used in order to assess progress. The Committee was following closely the situation in Gaza as it was in other situations of conflict. She agreed on the need to promote women in parliament. The Committee was in discussions with States that had reservations to the Convention in an effort to ensure implementation. National Governments were encouraged to implement and to monitor the Convention.

45. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer, State of Palestine) said that Palestinian women welcomed the accession by the State of Palestine to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women since it represented a step toward achieving full equality and development for Palestinian women.

46. **Ms. Vilaseca** (Plurinational State of Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly as the guiding policy framework for the achievement of women's development and gender equality, the full realization of their rights and the socioeconomic empowerment of women and girls. While some progress had been made, women were still severely affected by a high incidence of poverty, violence, extremism and discrimination. There was an urgent need to address the disparity between women in the different regions as well as the root causes of the disparities between men and women and those arising from armed conflicts and socioeconomic constraints.

47. Many women and girls did not have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential and faced a myriad of challenges including lack of access to social, educational and health services. Intensified efforts were needed to address the increase in trafficking of women and girls; gender-based violence; the spread of HIV and AIDS; unemployment; and lack of access to social services. The effects of communicable and non-communicable diseases further affected the ability of women to realize their rights.

48. New threats and challenges were emerging and appropriate measures would need to be adopted in order to address the negative impacts of the global economic and financial crisis; the food crisis and

continuing food insecurity; energy access; impediments to international trade; and climate change, particularly for women and girls with disabilities. Gender-sensitive budgeting initiatives would contribute to gender equality.

49. As Member States deliberated on the post-2015 development agenda, it was imperative that national efforts allowed for the participation of women and girls at all levels of decision-making. It was important to continue to share national experiences and to support national programmes for women and girls with disabilities, migrants and rural and indigenous women and girls. UN-Women would play a key role in improving coordination within the United Nations System in order to overcome the barriers that impeded the advancement of women. International cooperation and global partnership would also contribute to the empowerment of women including through the fulfilment of commitments on official development assistance, debt relief, market access, financial and technical support and capacity building, especially in the fields of education, health and job creation.

50. **Mr. Msosa** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, expressed concern that document A/69/211, he expressed concern that it did not contain an in-depth, multidisciplinary report on the root causes and contributing factors to the practice of female genital mutilations and cutting, its impact and prevalence as requested in General Assembly resolution 67/146.

51. Recognizing that equality between women and men was an important principle for sustainable development, peace and security, the African Group reaffirmed its commitment to the advancement of women. The African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa provided the basis for holding Governments accountable for advancing the status and rights of women. Empowering women at national and regional levels was directly linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Union had placed the Goals at the heart of their strategy. African States continued to champion gender equality and the empowerment of women through groundbreaking initiatives such as the African Women's Decade (2010-2020) and the Africa-wide campaign to end violence against women. Since women and girls were key to the eradication of poverty and to the achievement of sustainable development, gender equality perspectives should be incorporated in follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals and in the post-2015 development framework.

52. While some progress had been achieved in women's empowerment, much remained to be done in respect of income disparities, labour market discrimination, high unemployment and high incidence of poverty. Women had less access to productive capacity and social services than men and gender gaps existed in access to such resources as credit, economic opportunities, power and politics. Therefore, it was important to ensure equalities between men and women in all spheres of life through the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Women and girls should participate in planning, implementing and monitoring development policies and programmes. There was a need to strengthen the role of women in formal and informal trade and to put in place improved infrastructure in order to improve women's access to markets and to close the gap in information and communications technologies.

53. It was imperative to assess the progress achieved on gender equality and empowerment of women and to evaluate the needs of women who were caught in a poverty and demographic trap due to lack of skills and barriers to owning land and other productive resources. There was an urgent need to focus on the empowerment of rural women, who constituted one fourth of the world's population; the majority of African women lived in rural areas. Consideration should be given to women and girls in war-torn economies and to their exclusion from post-conflict reconstruction and peace building. Advocacy should be promoted to eliminate child and forced marriage and to address the challenges of maternal and infant mortality, particularly where women did not have access to obstetric care. Women continued to face many types of violence and the needs of women and girls with disabilities were not adequately met; those living with HIV faced stigma and violence as a result of their status. Attention should be given to women whose livelihoods depended on agriculture and natural resources and who were losing income due to environmental degradation and natural disasters and to those who were displaced, trafficked, in child prostitution and sexually abused. It was of utmost importance to develop policies that enabled women

and girls to acquire knowledge, develop self-esteem and take responsibility for their own lives.

54. As front-line health-workers and caregivers, women were at increased risk of contracting Ebola; it was therefore important to adopt a gender-based approach to the humanitarian response to the outbreak in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

55. Women could not attain equality without the strong political commitment of Governments and international community partnerships, extensive social mobilization and new investments, as well as their inclusion in policy formulation and in political and economic decision-making processes.

56. **Ms. Ruín** (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that it was vital to use the opportunity of the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to strengthen the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all sectors and in all areas of development. Consensus existed at the multilateral level that priority should be given to women's empowerment as a prerequisite for the advancement of the development agenda. She welcomed the inclusion of a stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls in the sustainable development goals proposed in the report of the Open Working Group and the inclusion of critical dimensions such as a life free from violence and discrimination, ensuring access and resource distribution and gender equality in decision-making.

57. The post-2015 development agenda, including the sustainable development goals, must build on lessons learned by directly tackling both unequal power relations between men and women and gender stereotypes. The broader context for the realization of gender equality must be recognized, including the impact of economic crises, violence, persistent conflict, climate change and environmental degradation and must be relevant to small island developing states and middle-income countries. The new development agenda must also build stronger institutions, a more participatory and effective governance and greater accountability to deliver change for women and girls.

58. States parties should comply with their international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol particularly since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention were mutually reinforcing.

59. The status of women was a matter of growing concern, notably the feminization of poverty; the unequal burden of unpaid care work; violence against women and trafficking in women and girls. She reaffirmed the need to eradicate the poverty experienced by women, to recognize the centrality of gender equity in the debate on development and to transform the division of labour.

60. She underlined the importance of women's access to education; health care services; including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and information and education and prevention programmes for adolescent pregnancy; as well as employment, including elimination of barriers to equal conditions for women and men in the workplace, equal pay for equal work, social protection and economic empowerment.

61. She expressed concern about the situation of migrant, rural and indigenous women, women with disabilities, older women and women of African descent. The Latin and Caribbean States had agreed to intensify efforts to develop the potential of women and girls who faced multiple discrimination factors whether of race, ethnic origin, culture, religion or social status. Social and economic development and the achievement of full democracy were only possible in conditions of genuine equality and the countries on behalf of which she spoke were committed to mainstreaming a gender perspective in public policies. The participation of women in government and decision-making should be promoted and their representation increased at the highest levels of Government.

62. Efforts should be made to combat violence against women and girls and to adopt a coordinated and systemic approach, addressing in particular the emerging issues of femicide and violence resulting from drug trafficking and illicit use of small arms. Gender-related killings of women and girls were deeply concerning and should be tackled with training and capacity building to further enhance the investigation and prosecution of those cases. She pledged support for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against indigenous women and to combat trafficking in persons, including smuggling and exploitation of

migrants. She called on States to establish and strengthen appropriate focal points for coordination among countries of origin, transit and destination to combat those crimes.

63. States should further ensure that public spaces, the workplace, communities and schools were safe for women and girls; the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean had pioneered the development of instruments and mechanisms with a view to preventing and eliminating violence against women and promoting the full enjoyment of their human rights. The delegations of those countries expressed their willingness to collaborate with initiatives to eliminate female genital mutilation and to end obstetric fistula.

64. Latin American and Caribbean Member States strongly supported the mandate of UN-Women and recognized the global challenges that required coordinated and coherent work. As a region composed mostly of middle-income countries, Latin American and Caribbean Member States faced significant difficulties in protecting the rights of women and girls and in addressing vulnerabilities resulting from poverty, discrimination and gender inequality. The progress achieved was exposed to the risks of national and global economic and political crises, natural disasters and organized crime. Therefore, she advocated for more international dialogue and cooperation to support national initiatives in developing countries in order to assist the design and implementation of public policies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. She called on Member States, multilateral organizations and all sectors of society to build on the progress made to date.

65. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the status of women and girls was an issue of seminal importance with many challenges continuing to beset global and national efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Member States had been reminded, during the recent International Day of the Girl Child, that approximately 250 million girls lived in poverty, some 31 million girls were denied a basic education, complications during pregnancy were a leading cause of death among girls aged 15 to 19 years and that gender-based violence was an increasing cause for concern. Violence inflicted on women and girls was a pervasive violation of human rights that was practised across ethnicity and class, causing degradation of the social and moral fabric.

66. The 2014 World Bank Report entitled: "Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity", underscored that being a woman was one of the most common markers of disadvantage in the quest for socioeconomic advancement. The disadvantage was played out in many ways: discrimination in access to education, decent work and economic assets; limited voice in society and the economy as a result of under-representation in politics and in the corporate world; and child marriages. Speaking to the violence experienced by women and girls, the report observed: "in most of the world, no place is less safe for a woman than her own home."

67. Caribbean Community States had made unceasing efforts to improve the status of women. Caribbean women themselves had been key advocates and actors in addressing discrimination, contributing to change through reform of the law relating to domestic violence and to the family; and to minimum wage legislation. Yet although Caribbean women had higher participation rates in the economy than their counterparts in some other parts of the Americas, it had not improved their status in the labour market, which remained significantly inferior to that of men. Caribbean Community Member States had taken steps to fulfil their treaty obligations by providing improved access to public resources and to increased participation of women in the labour market. They had also sought to address the challenges of poverty, inequality and sexual and domestic violence. A CARICOM Strategy and Plan had been put in place in order to reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies in the region. Caribbean Community governments were committed to ensuring the equal participation of women and men in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and to strengthen the legal and institutional environment in order to ensure the rights of women and children. Youth development was integral to ensuring that human capacity development was relevant to the societal needs of the Region and the early involvement of young women in leadership and decision-making roles was important in that context.

68. The Caribbean Community supported the mainstreaming of gender equality and the empowerment of women into the post-2015 development agenda. It also supported the introduction of a standalone goal in that area as suggested by the

Open Working Group. The situation of indigenous women and girls deserved additional focus. He reaffirmed the commitment to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and undertook to translate the commitments by its Member States into meaningful change for equality, peace and sustainable development.

69. **Mr. Gumende** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community(SADC), reaffirmed its commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and to other international and regional instruments related to the advancement of women. One of the Community's main objectives was to achieve sustainable development, alleviate poverty and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration. Women were the backbone of many African economies; many worked in the informal sector and spent a high percentage of their income on feeding and educating their children. Nevertheless, women still constituted the majority of the poor in the region for reasons including high illiteracy rates and limited access to, and control over, productive resources. In response to that challenge, the Southern African Development Community had adopted a protocol on gender and development with 28 measurable targets to be reached by 2015. The protocol promoted gender-responsive legislation and called for the harmonization of national, regional, continental and international instruments on gender equality and equity.

70. The economic independence of women was crucial in countering exploitation, the feminization of poverty and discrimination. Gender equality contributed to poverty reduction and economic development. Member States in the region had put in place programmes aimed at empowering women to improve their own situations and enhance their potential for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. A women's economic empowerment framework was used to help the region to deliver its economic empowerment programme for women.

71. The Protocol of the Southern African Development Community called on its member states to enact and enforce legislation that would combat gender-based violence; provide for the care of victims of sexual violence; prevent human trafficking; and prohibit sexual harassment. Currently, 12 of the 15 member states had in place laws to combat domestic violence and 11 had integrated national action plans that addressed gender-based violence. However, enacting laws and treating victims of sexual assault proved difficult either because of the failure to report incidents or the lack of funds.

72. The region had made progress in gender equality in many areas, with an increase in the numbers of women in politics and decision-making. In the health sector, there had been a decrease in maternal mortality rates in some countries and, with regard to education, most had reached parity for the enrolment of boys and girls in primary schools, although the retention of girls in late primary school and secondary school remained a problem. Gender perspectives had been introduced in education policies.

73. Despite those achievements, enormous challenges remained: the gap between commitment and implementation was a major concern. Contradictions persisted between customary and national laws and the representation of women in decision-making positions was below stated goals. The feminization of poverty was reflected by the high incidence of poverty among women and the gendered nature of HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths. Concerted efforts were required to remedy those problems.

74. He reiterated the commitment of the Southern African Development Community to strengthen collaboration and cooperation with the international community and development partners in order to achieve gender equality and the advancement of women.

75. **Mr. Tuy** (Cambodia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that the Association was committed to the advancement of women, having established an ASEAN Women Leaders' Conference in 1975. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women met annually to carry out coordination and monitoring of the implementation of key regional priorities and cooperation in women's issues and concerns. A Declaration on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN had been adopted in 1988 and a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the ASEAN Region had been adopted in 2004 and operationalized through various work plans and initiatives, including an Intergovernmental Governmental Commission on

Human Rights and a Commission for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children.

76. Issues concerning women had been advanced through education, a balanced gender ratio in the population, women's participation in the labour force and in political life. The ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network provided a platform for women to mentor each other and share best practices. The Ministerial Meeting on Women established partnerships with international organizations in working for gender equality and eliminating violence and discrimination against women and it convened regional workshops and training sessions for government officials, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, adopted in 2012, acknowledged the rights of women as an integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Its post-2015 vision and medium-term plan, currently under development, would be inclusive and gender-responsive, taking into account the issues of female migrant workers and women as victims and agents of change in response to climate change impact and in disaster risk reduction.

77. ASEAN Member States were ready to work closely with interested partners for the advancement of women. The role of the ASEAN Secretariat would be critical in making gender mainstreaming a standard practice in ASEAN policies and programmes.

78. **Ms. Schlyter** (European Union), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, the candidate countries, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the country of the stabilization and association process Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, and Georgia, said that discrimination and violence against women and girls continued around the world. Girls were prevented from going to school or forced to marry. Women were subjected to violence, even in their own homes. In any given society, women had fewer opportunities than men to grow socially and professionally. Sexual violence remained a deplorable and widely used tactic of war and women human rights defenders were attacked for doing their work.

79. Significant progress had been made in recent years in completing international and national legal frameworks on gender equality and the empowerment of women, although much remained to be done. In marking 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and 15 years since Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the focus should be on implementing the commitments set out in those instruments in order to achieve the goals set. Gender equality and women's empowerment were preconditions for poverty eradication and sustainable development, two themes that would be at the heart of the new development agenda. Gender equality should therefore be included as a stand-alone goal as well as mainstreamed in the post-2015 framework.

80. The European Union was committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights and to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; the European Institute for Gender Equality was preparing an independent monitoring report "Beijing+20" on the basis of which the Council of the European Union would adopt policy recommendations for future action on gender quality. A conference on the future of gender equality would shortly be held in Rome under the Italian Presidency of the European Union.

81. She welcomed the initiatives to reinforce regional and cross-regional dialogue on gender issues including the EU-CELAC Dialogue on Gender launched in November 2013. She further welcomed the key role that UN-Women played in empowering women and eliminating violence against women and girls through its programmes, technical assistance and advocacy work. The European Union and UN-Women had intensified cooperation through implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding to foster policy dialogue and cooperation in several fields, including combating sexual and gender-based violence.

82. Women's economic empowerment and their full participation in economic life were crucial for development and for improving the quality of life of both women and men. The European Union Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015 had guided the institution's external action and was part of its strategy to accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In the year marking the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the European Union had reconfirmed its commitment to improve political and material support to human rights defenders, with special focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups and to countries affected by conflict. The European Union was fully committed to

the effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and urged all countries to ratify it. The work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was highly valued; it was hoped that the process of treaty body strengthening would lead to enhanced reporting on and implementation of the Convention.

83. The European Union strongly condemned all forms of violence against women and girls: neither custom, tradition, culture, religion, nor so-called honour could be invoked to justify violence or to diminish the obligations of States with respect to the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls and the effective prosecution of perpetrators. The European Union supported the fight against all harmful practices affecting girls and women, men and boys, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage; it had pledged more than 100 million euro for the next seven years to gender equality and child wellbeing under its Global Public Goods and Challenges programme.

84. The European Union was committed to promoting the role of women in peace and security and to ending sexual violence in conflict. It supported the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict since protecting women and ending impunity were priorities.

85. The European Union was working to establish a policy on transitional justice which was expected to integrate a strong gender dimension. It had recently strengthened its gender-sensitive approach in response to humanitarian crises and, since 2014, applied a Gender-Age Marker to all humanitarian projects. Women and girls who were refugees or internally displaced were exposed to increased vulnerability in conflict situations and natural disasters.

86. She welcomed the upcoming Arms Trade Treaty, which recognized the impacts of international arms transfers on women and their rights and contained a binding criterion on gender-based violence.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.